

Moving your children's ministry from average to great.

Welcome to you all, just to make sure you are all in the correct place - were talking about moving an average children's ministry into a great one.

I'm Rosalie & this is my husband Ryan, we are from New Life Church, Bryanston and have been running Kidslife (which is our Children's ministry) for the past 9 year. Ryan works in IT and as you can see has been roped into doing the powerpoint for me! I come from a background of hospitality and event's management. I have been on staff at New Life for 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ year. Ryan & I have 2 daughters Hannah (7) & Sarah (4 $\frac{1}{2}$ months)

Before we kick off, I would just like to open in prayer....

Just a bit of history about us, Ryan has been involved in children's ministry for over 20 years but we got involved as a couple in 2005. When we took on Kidslife we had approx 130 kids per Sunday with a volunteer base of 20. We being totally unaware of what was actually involved took on Kidslife in a part time capacity and after 3 months, we realised that we were just not going to take the ministry to where in needed to be unless I was able to dedicate more time to it. I then started working half days at the church. We now have a team of 3 full time staff & 3 part time staff working on Kidslife. We have approx 700 kids on our date base with an average 290 kids each week & we have a volunteer base of 150. So in 9 years Kidslife has come a long way & we give God all the Glory.

Our vision is to glorify God and to create a safe and irresistible environment where children can learn more about God & enter into a personal relationship with Jesus and create lasting friendships.

By the time they are 5 we want them to know (Injabulo 3 truths) and by the time they are 12 we would like them to know (Kidslife 3 truths) we want be a part of changing children's lives to follow Christ.

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We have learnt a lot along the way on how to do things & also how not to do things. We are constantly learning & improving things and will continue to strive towards excellence. We have had Sundays that have been so amazing and awesome & then we've had Sundays where I wanted to quit & never come back because of all the things that went wrong, but they are all part of the process and learning curve in our journey. It's important to remember that changes don't just happen overnight, it's a process & we will make mistakes. There is no problem in making mistake as long as you learn from them & don't repeat them. Excellence is sometimes seen as trying to be a 'perfectionist' but I see it more as never ending improvement. If you can do it better - shouldn't you - because it brings Glory to God.

And it really does not matter how big or small your children's ministry, every child needs to hear the gospel, don't get disillusioned if your don't have hundreds of kids on a Sunday (in fact I sometimes feel that smaller churches are more impactful as it's easier to build relationships). Each soul is precious and needs to know Jesus!

Today I really just want to share with you some of the core elements that we feel can move your ministry from average to Great. I'm not wanting to sound like I'm coming from any high ground, We want to return what we have learnt as we are all on the same team! So whether you are involved in a small, med or large ministry, what I'm about to share with you is a testimony of what God has done at Kidslife so I trust that some parts will help you and move your ministry one step closer to where God would like it to be.

Firstly there is Prayer. It's essential to the growth of any ministry. I'm not going to go into detail on this, but just to say that you need to pray for the Children's ministry that you are involved with continually. - 1 Thess 5:16-18 (Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Jesus Christ for you)

The 2nd core element is support from your Snr Pastor. Psalms 133:1 says -Behold how good and how pleasant it for the brethren to dwell together in unity
We have been exceptionally fortunate to have our Snr Pastors 150% support which has been awesome. I have regular update sessions with Chris & Lisa Stark (our Snr Pastor) so that we can discuss the goals and ensure that we are working together to achieve the same goal. Children's ministry is not an island on it's own - we see the main church as the earth & us as the moon, so we move around & with the earth. A successful Children's ministry can actually grow your main church service. The fact is Parents will go where their children are happy. If you are involved in a church where your Pastor does not have a heart for children I encourage you to pray about it and to trust God to reveal the importance of Children's ministry to them. Just keep doing your best for the kids & your fruit will speak for itself.

The 3rd core element is Volunteers, this is a big one - with out them you really can't do Sundays !

Firstly you need to recruit volunteers, when we started at Kidslife we had just about no volunteers so we made announcements in the church and also by roping in our friends (smsed everyone) - and still to this day, some of our friends are serving at Kidslife! At first we took anyone that would come (desperate times call for deperate measures), but now we have a basic criteria that they need to be a member of New Life and they have to complete an application form (basic screening process). Hayley Walker is speaking on Safety so if you don't have a screening process in place, I really encourage you to go and have a look at, it's something that is crucial for the protection of the children & the volunteers.

Recuit videos x 2 (we produce in house, but you can buy on line sermonspice.com

Okay so once you have you volunteers - how do you keep them motivated.

- **Encouragement & praise** - I personally sms/email 4-5 volunteers on a Monday/Tuesday to thank them for what they did, it's important here to be specific and to note something personal to each one not just a generic message
- We also send out **sms's about once a month** to the entire team with an encouraging scripture
- We also have **regular get-togethers** with all the volunteers to share the big picture with them. It's important that people are reminder why they are doing what they are doing. It also creates a wonderful team spirit and a unity. You can use this time to share the goals, plans for the months ahead and any changes that might be implemented. We actually stopped them for a while about a few years ago & just found that the team started to drift apart. We have found that they bring such unity in the team.
- We also have an **annual volunteer appreciation** event where we publically thank them for what they have done during the year. (Rap, Christmas Carols!). Personalise thank you card for all our Kidslife volunteers

- It's really important to have a **sustainable roster**, people often start out so keen, but if they are over committed, it eventually becomes too much & they just time out. So set some basic policies re how often people can serve and be firm with it. Our core leaders are there each week but the rest of the volunteers do 1 on 1 off, used to do 1 on in 3 just found that 1 on 1 off works well for the kids as far as familiarity is concerned, We also have quite a few husband/wife teams or mother/child so we ensure that they are on the same week. At some churches what have multiple services have the same team serving each week at the 1 service & then the attend the other service, do what works for you.
- We also **remind them when they are on duty**, with an sms or email and our policy is that if they don't RSVP to us then we follow up with a call. Even if there is a roster and everyone knows when they should be there, they often forget!
- Once the **team is confirmed for that Sunday**, on the Saturday we send out another sms to say 'see you there'. We try to make the fun & upbeat it also doubles up as a confirmation that the team will be there cause if they receive an sms and can't be there it should prompt them to call us.
- I also make a note of an issue or something someone might be going through & then follow up on it during the week - really just to '**Pastor**' the people. We also call/sms people on their Birthdays. They need to know that they are cared for and people love being part of a team of people who care for them. I also then add them onto our Pastoral prayer list so that as a church we can pray for them during the week. (husband away, difficult time at work, parent not well)
- On a practical level - we do our best to **make it easy for our volunteers** to serve on a Sunday so do all the lesson prep in advance for them. When they arrive everything that they need in neatly packed in a box and given to them. We don't expect them lay out any costs for the materials (Boxes all packed & ready) We want them to know that they are valuable to us and we want to set them up to succeed.
- We also supply all our volunteers with **t-shirts** - they get the 1st one free & then need to pay for another one if the need it. Use to launder them in house and had - we do it for 2 reasons - one to make it easy for the team & 2ndly to ensure that everyone has a shirt on the day - you know how

people can mean to bring it but just forget or it goes through the wash and comes out pink ! but I must say our volunteers are doing great! - no pink shirts yet!!

- With the shirts - we also **have lanyards/name badges** places out for the team that are serving. Helps parents & kids know who's who (even me at times!) and makes people feel part of a team
- I encourage the volunteers to give us as much feedback as they can - sometimes at the end of a Sunday morning, (book for notes) but they can also email, sms me anytime. Some are really great as they are working, on the ground' so to speak and see things that we often can't see and the issues are easy to fix/change and make the world of difference to the volunteers. (juice/biscuit cards, scissors in juices for water) Just a word of advise - be careful not to commit to implement them (some ideas are just too weird!)
- And lastly don't be scared to be **honest/speak the truth** in love if there are problems/ things you are not happy with. Use people's different gifts where they are best suited, if someone is in the wrong dept/area do your best to move them around to a different place where they can be in their 'sweet spot', they will then flourish and be a true blessing

Volunteers are our biggest asset and it's vital that they feel valued & important and they also need to be reminded of the huge role that they play in the children's lives.

The 4th core element is - Systems & Logistics - This is one of my specialities I'm known as the systems queen!

There is an awesome saying that says ' every 10 min spent in planning will save up to 2 hours in implementation', and if you are anything like me you could always do with an extra 2 hours in your day. God is a God of systems - just look at our bodies - they are created with millions of systems.

So when it comes to planning for Sundays, I really do believe that you can't over plan and what I find most helpful when we are planning a change/different format to a morning is to walk it through in my mind step by step.

Pre-planning is crucial to the smooth running of any children's ministry. We plan about 6 weeks ahead of time and just find that time buys excellence. By planning in advance we only have to do 1 shop (with a super duper long list!) and you have time to make an alternative plan if what you had thought of is not going to work

So it all sounds really simple but what if you are not a system person? there is a really easy solution - find one! You will be amazed that you will have at least 1 or 2 in your team at the moment. And trust me, systems people are always happy to help implement new systems, so use them & their gifting. You need to put basic systems in place to ensure the smooth running of the ministry.

We have check-list for each & every thing that needs to get done during the week & we have check-lists for all the 'jobs' on Sundays. Using a check-list makes life so easy - you just have to go down the list with out thinking and if all is done on time & in the right order your morning should run smoothly. It also makes it so easy for new people to get involved. There is a list to go through & explain rather than trying to remember it all because for sure you will forget something & for 100% certain the new person will not remember it all. Bottom line, check lists make life easy

Also people like to serve in a well organised place, we do all we can to keep things neat & tidy, firstly so that it's easy to find & 2ndly so that people can see & know what is what. It's also easy to keep stuff packed in small areas if they are neatly packed and if your church is like ours, you probably have very limited storage place so every mm counts!

So once you have the volunteers all sorted how do you get the kids? An appealing environment & atmosphere - that's the 5th core element. Just look around - what do the kids see? What are they attracted by? = Colour - music - changing graphics, a vibe and of course food!

Think of what the movies are like - and you can get them to sit for 1 ½ hours and they remember everything about it.

When it comes to décor & the buildings - the sky is the limit but unfortunately the budget does have a limit! If you are fortunate enough to have a big budget - go big - but if not do what you can with what you have got

Music is a big player here, ever walked into a room where there is no music & everyone stares at you as you walk in & the door squeaks? Nothing worse. Music just breaks the silence and sets the tone for the morning. Be careful what you play & too much hype will get the kids buzzing and you don't want them to bounce off the walls.

Colour makes a huge difference and a coat of paint can be quite inexpensive but make a huge difference. If you don't have a permanent building then get posters or pull up banners to brighten up the room. Make sure that what you do is also relevant to the age group you are targeting - Noah's ark is very colourful but just isn't going to do it for a 12 year old.

Be creative with different songs/music - we use wonderful Christian music (Hillsong, City Point) and we even use secular stuff (**RESPECT - play song**) Countdowns (help keep on time), can buy on line - sermonspice.com, DVD's (change of voice - kids watch tv all the time), drama (as long as it's well rehearsed), outfits (dress up with the theme - Feb theme - kindness, mad scientist - FAITH - our team always game!)

In having all this fun and excitement - we all know how kids can get out of hand and just bounce off the walls - so it's crucial to keep discipline in place & structure there - set some basic rule (kids code)

I think you all have heard this before but if not you have certainly experienced it - that the attention span of a child is these same in minutes as their age is = 5 = 5 min, 8 = 8 min so you have you keep changing things in the morning.

Okay so let's work out the average age here so that I know how long I can talk for !!

The morning needs to consist of Ebs & flows - this is the 6th Core element our Sunday schedule).

We do a 'Sunday schedule' or 'Order of service' each week - it included everything that we are doing that morning. (each dept has own)

It also has a Basic todo list for people running the morning to help us remember everything. Kids like & need routine but also need change so keep the morning changing. You need to have structure but bring a surprise element into the morning (wedding dress - kindness, sword fighting - courage, P& W in a circle, initiative - litter, joy - present box)

Our 6-10 : morning starts with a countdown - then large group, P & W, small groups, large group, small group & large group again all in 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ hour

Our 10-13: P&W, ice breaker, teaching, small group

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In going with our morning programme the 7th core element is the kids participation in the morning - Make sure that you include the kids in the morning & that they can participate in different parts of the , they need to get rid of the excess energy but also need to feel a part of what's going on. Kids also learn by doing.

with all the hype & buzz it easy to forget to have personal contact wit the kids. I encourage volunteers to reach out to 2/3 kids personally, it's so important that the kids feel cared for. As the number of kids increase it easy to loose touch with them so this way it get 30-40 volunteers each reaching out to 3 kids - that's 120 kids that have felt cared for each week, which is awesome. (sick mom, exam ect)

when it come to Curriculum/Teachings, there are some great curriculums out there (Ivangelii, Willowcreek, internet) and this is the 8th core element. There are many brilliant curriculums out there but not all of them will work for your environment, so do your research and if you want to write your own that great. But which ever one you use, make sure that you have a plan and that you are well prepared. Ensure that who ever is using the curriculum know how to work with it & that they know the BIG picture - what the goal for the day is and how that are going to achieve it. For the past 6 years, we have been using a use a curriculum from the USA called Re-think/Orange which has different lessons for each set of age. For our 6-10 yr olds the curriculum is virtue based so the do the same virtue for the month even if they only come twice they will still have an understanding of what it's all about. We try to each more for less (Courage themes x 4 - David & Goliath, Esther, Mishach, Daniel)

we have also found that putting our tweens - in between - all dressed up & nowhere to go (10-12 years) in a different place & with a different curriculum has worked well, we aim our Kidslife morning at an 8 year old so it's just way uncool for a 12 year old.

Make sure that the curriculum works for you & use it as a guideline, feel free to tailor make it to suit your church dynamics. As I mentioned our curriculum is from the USA to we have to SA it, so just use it a guide. We actually have used different parts of different programmes (Promised land & Basic 252) to create of current programme, so do feel bound by the curriculum, use it as a guide

So now you have managed to get through a Sunday with not too many problems, the volunteers all arrived (and not!) & the morning ran well - what next?

It's important to evaluate Sundays with is our 9th core value. Take time with you core leaders to look at the positives & negatives for that Sunday. Celebrate what when right & learn what you can from what went wrong. As a church we do it on a Tuesday morning where we all get together & for about 1 hour discuss Sunday from parking to ushers to kids etc, for Kidslife I meet with the team during the week & discuss Kidslife in detail. We then allocate people responsible to fixing each of the problem that we experienced and then get to sorting them out that week. There are very few problems that can get sorted out in a week. (example with the batteries for the remote, not enough crayons, video clip not working ect) I then follow up on the items during the week to make sure that everything has been addressed.

The 10th core element which we are still working on, is Parent involvement. We only have 90 min with the kids each week where as the parents have the rest of the week with them. The Bible says in Proverbs 22:6 'train up your child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it'. I believe that this applies to parents and legal guardians. The parents are bringing their children to church to be train so we also are a part of that process. It's crucial to keep good relations with the parents and to keep them well informed as to what is being taught. (take home letters) so that they can reinforce it at home & they also have a monthly challenge on them which helps the parents to get involved during the week

Be around when parents arrive & leave - make yourself available for parents if there is a need

The final core element for leaders is leadership support. On a personal level, if you are leading the Children's ministry in your church, firstly ensure that you know what is going on in each dept and that you have regular meeting with the different team leaders to hear from them. Ensure that you have a good 2IC/ team in place in place, you need support & you also need to think about the future. A good leader works himself/herself out of a job. When we first took on Kidslife, I don't think we have a weekend off for months, and when ever we did I would just wait to head what crisis had happened that Sunday and it was not from poor planning but poor management. When I learnt to hand over the reins to well trusted people they grew and my head aches shrank. When I took 3 month maternity leave off, everything ran well. I find that we now have such a phenomenal team in place that I don't really have any 'actual' job on a Sunday - I can really oversee all the Dept's and also help where ever the need arises.

So build up a team around you - Don't cling onto things, remember that it all belongs to God's! make sure that you have a good trust worthy support team in place and make sure that you take time off too. You are not good if you are burnt out and frazzled each week.

In conclusion, I just want to encourage you all to keep doing what you are doing.

Galatians 6:9 says - and let us not grow weary while doing good for in due season we shall reap the reward if we do not loose heart

Kids ministry is not seen by everyone and is a behind the scenes ministry. But it is so important in God's eyes, Jesus himself stopped proceedings to minister to the children. We are all a part of passing the gospel onto the next generation, so let's do it with excellence and will all we have so that it brings Glory to God.

Questions & Answers - email up!